(b) if so, how many bridges have been identified in the State which require urgent reconstruction;

(c) whether Government plan to reconstruct the same; if so, by when the reconstruction is likely to be undertaken;

(d) whether the State Government has requested to extend assistance from the Railway Safety Fund for reconstruction of dilapidated rail bridges; and

(e) if so, the details thereof and the reaction of the Government thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI O. RAJAGOPAL): (a) to (c) Railway Bridges are inspected every year to assess their condition and maintenance needs. This is followed by action required to enable safety. Bridges showing signs of distress like cracks etc. are classified as distressed bridges and after more detailed inspection planned for replacement or major repairs. Presently, 2 Railway bridges in Kerala are classified as distressed and are planned to be taken up for replacement/rehabilitation in 2002-03 and work is expected to be completed by 2004-05.

(d) No, Sir.

(e) Does not arise.

Alternate Rail Connection to Andhra Pradesh

1428. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Railways have sought an alternate route, to connect Andhra Pradesh with North India;

(b) whether the existing route between Delhi and Andhra Pradesh *via* Nagpur involves delays and bad rail track;

(c) if so, the details of the new route proposed to reduce travel time between Delhi and Andhra Pradesh;

(d) the proposed cost of such a new route; and

(e) what distance it would entail?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI O. RAJAGOPAL): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Delhi-Hyderabad is an 'A' route. Tract renewal and maintenance works are carried out regularly depending upon the need and availability of funds. For ensuring the safety and punctuality, track is inspected regularly and corrective action taken promptly whenever required.

(c) to (e) Do not arise.

Standard Gauge in Andhra Pradesh

1429. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister for RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have cleared a proposal to introduce standard gauge in parts of Andhra Pradesh, instead of broad gauge;

(b) if so, the extent of length which would be taken up in the current year for conversion to standard gauge;

(c) whether any routes have been identified in the State;

(d) if so, the details of such routes and the distance thereof; and

(e) the possible date of commencing this conversion work?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI O. RAJAGOPAL): (a) No, Sir.

(b) to (e) Do not arise.

Free Rail Travel for Farmers

†1430. SHRI JANESHWAR MISHRA: Will the Minister for RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government would provide free to and fro rail travel facility to farmers, on the pattern of Railway and other Central and State Government employees;

(b) if so, the deails thereof; and

(c) whether Government propose to formulate a scheme to provide free rail travel facilities to farmers from one State to others and the metropolitan cities every year, Zone-wise/State-wise?

†Original notice of the Question was received in Hindi.